

Take Charge of Your Diabetes

A Reinforcement Booklet
for People With Diabetes



1. Introduction

Diabetes touches almost every part of your life. It's a serious, lifelong condition, but there's so much you can do to protect your health. You can take charge of your health—not only for today, but for the coming years.

Balance is the key word in living well with diabetes. Strive for balance in all parts of your life. You need to balance your diet, physical activity, and medication. With the support of your family and friends, your health care team, and your community, you can take charge of your diabetes.



Work with your health care team to take charge of your diabetes.

What Is Diabetes?

Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose (sugar) for our bodies to use as energy. The pancreas, an organ near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin, which helps glucose get into our body cells. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin very well. This problem causes glucose to build up in your blood.

Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes

Listed below are some signs and symptoms of diabetes. You may have had some signs before you found out you had diabetes:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Blurry vision
- Feeling tired
- Weight loss
- Dry skin
- Sores that don't heal
- Frequent infections
- Numbness or tingling in the feet
- Vomiting

Types of Diabetes

There are two main types of diabetes:

- Type 1
- Type 2

People with type 1 diabetes usually find out they have diabetes when they are children or young adults. For

people with type 1 diabetes, the pancreas makes little or no insulin, and insulin must be injected daily to live.

Most people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes. The pancreas of people with type 2 diabetes keeps making insulin for some time, but the body can't use it very well. Most people with type 2 find out about their diabetes after age 30 or 40. However, more children and young adults are now getting type 2 diabetes.

Some risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes are:

- A family history of diabetes
- Lack of physical activity
- Overweight
- Unhealthy diet (examples: foods high in fat or eating too much)
- Being of Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, American Indian, Hispanic, Latino, or African American heritage

2. Diabetes Control

A. Diet

Your goals of healthy eating are to:

- Maintain healthy blood sugar levels
- Maintain or achieve healthy body weight
- Eat the right amount of healthy foods



Courtesy of State of Hawaii Department of Health—Nutrition and Physical Activity Section

Guidelines for healthy eating:

1) Eat Three Meals a Day

Eat at least 3 meals a day with healthy snacks in between, or have 5–6 smaller meals throughout the day to keep blood sugar at healthy levels.

2) Pay Attention to Food Portions

Limit food portions; you can control your blood sugar better.

3) Choose Foods From Three or More Food Groups for Each Meal

By eating foods from three or more food groups, you can keep your blood sugar at healthy levels. Example: starch, vegetables, and protein.



Courtesy of State of Hawaii Department of Health—Nutrition and Physical Activity Section

4) Choose Foods Lower in Fat

Eat less fried foods and use less fat. Limit butter, margarine, coconut oil, lard, mayonnaise, canned meats, pre-packaged foods, and other foods high in fat.



Courtesy of the Federated States of Micronesia Diabetes Control Program

5) Choose Foods High in Fiber

Choose foods such as brown rice, whole wheat bread, beans, and fresh vegetables and fruits.

6) Limit Sweets and Alcohol

These types of foods affect your blood sugar levels and should be limited.

Talk to your health care provider for help on serving sizes, food labels, and dining out.



B. Physical Activity

Physical activity is an important tool in managing your diabetes by helping you control your blood sugar and your weight. Physical activity can also help prevent heart problems.

Physical activity:

- Strengthens heart, lungs, and bones
- Increases muscle tone, strength, and endurance
- Controls weight and body fat
- Lowers blood pressure
- Improves your body's ability to prevent a cold
- Increases energy
- May decrease insulin dosage on exercise days
- Improves sex
- Improves sleep
- Relieves stress
- Makes you feel good!



C. A Few Things About Diabetes Medicine

If you take diabetes pills or insulin injections to control your diabetes, make sure your health care provider has explained how these work. Ask your health care provider questions if you are unclear.

D. Special Tips:

- Drink plenty of water. Eight (8) large glasses of water a day are recommended.
- Wear a necklace, tag, or bracelet that identifies you as a person with diabetes.
- Do physical activity with a friend.
- Wear socks and properly fitted shoes.
- Check your feet daily for blisters, redness, cuts, or open sores.
- If you don't feel well, stop the activity, check your blood glucose level, and call your doctor or primary care provider.
- Take medication as prescribed.

3. Keeping Track of Your Blood Sugar Level

You can control your blood sugar level by:

- Testing your blood sugar level each day
- Getting a hemoglobin A1c test from your health care provider about every 3 months if you take insulin and at least every 6 months if you take oral medicine for diabetes.

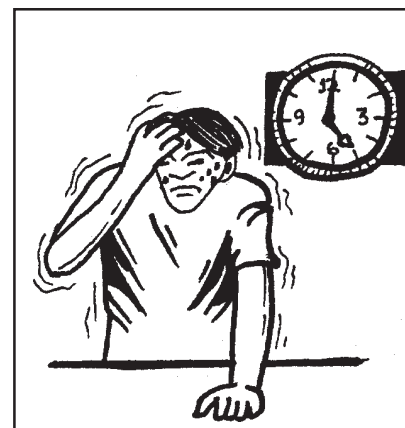
A. Signs of Low Blood Sugar

Signs of low blood sugar include:

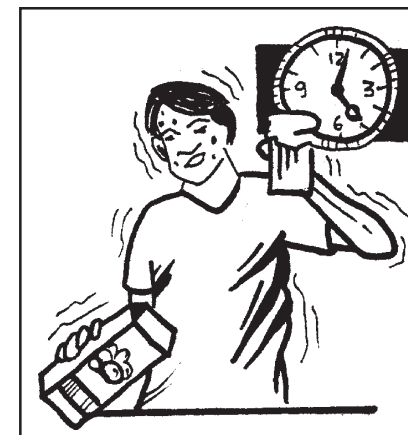
- Feeling nervous, shaky, or sweaty
- Feeling tired
- Becoming confused
- Passing out
- Having seizures (shaking)

To be safe, always check your blood sugar level before doing any of these things:

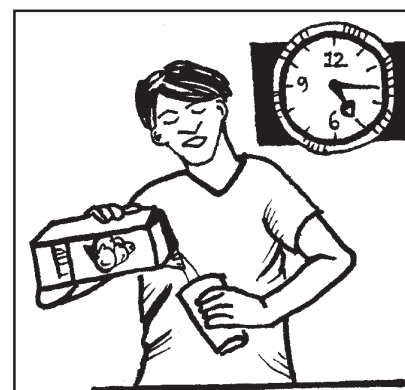
- Driving a vehicle
- Using heavy equipment
- Being very physically active
- Being active for long time



If you have signs that your blood sugar level is low but you can't test it right then....



...go ahead and drink some unsweetened fruit juice!



Drink some fruit juice every 15 minutes until your blood sugar level is normal.

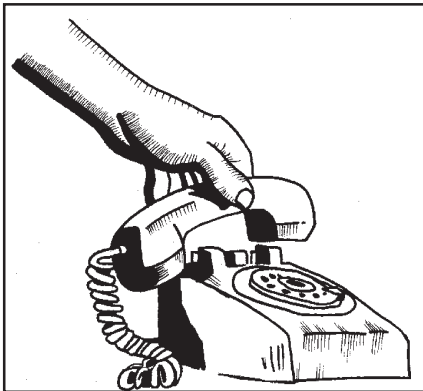
B. Signs of High Blood Sugar

Signs of high blood sugar are:

- Dry mouth
- Thirst
- Frequent urination
- Feeling tired
- Blurred vision
- Weight loss
- Stomach pain, feeling sick to your stomach, or even throwing up



Frequent urination can be a sign of high blood glucose.



You may need to call your doctor daily when you're sick.

If you have any signs of high blood sugar, test your blood or visit your local or public health clinic.

4. Diabetic Eye Disease

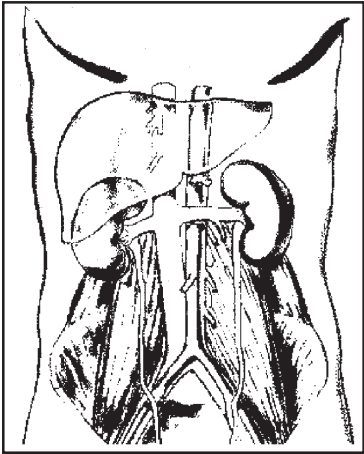
Signs of Diabetic Eye Disease

Have regular eye exams so that if diabetic eye problems occur, they will be found early. Be sure to tell your health care team or eye doctor about any eye problems you may have.



If you're having trouble with your vision, talk with your health care team or eye doctor.

5. Kidney Problems



Take care of your kidneys by controlling your blood sugar and blood pressure. Get a yearly blood test and urine test to check your kidney function.



Tell your health care provider if you have any signs of kidney or bladder infection.

Signs of bladder infection:
cloudy or bloody urine, urgent need to urinate

Signs of kidney infection:
back pain, chills, fever

6. Heart and Blood Vessel Problems

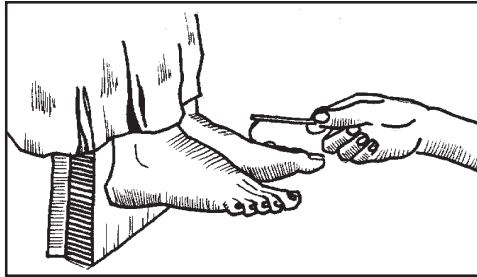
People with diabetes are more likely to have problems with their heart and nerves if blood sugar is not controlled.

Heart and blood vessel problems are the main causes of sickness, disability, and death among people with diabetes. Heart and blood vessel problems can also cause poor blood flow (circulation) in the legs and feet.

You're more likely to be at risk for heart and blood vessel problems, such as heart attack, congestive heart failure, or stroke, if you smoke cigarettes, have high blood pressure, or have too much cholesterol or other fats in your blood. Your health care team can help you lower your risk for heart and blood vessel problems and will tell you how often blood pressure and cholesterol should be checked.

7. Nerve Damage and Foot Problems

Nerve damage, circulation problems, and infections that do not heal can lead to serious foot problems for people with diabetes, including the possibility of amputation.



At least once a year, your health care provider should do a complete check of your feet and nerves.

Protect your feet by:

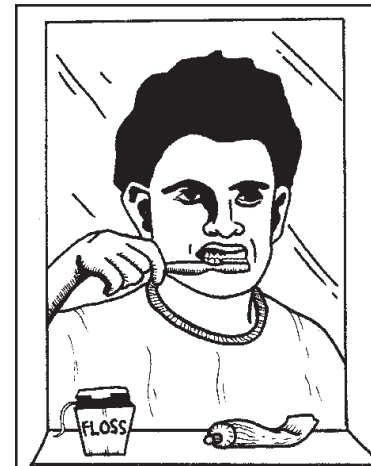
- Washing your feet daily
- Checking your feet daily for cracks, cuts, or blisters
- Controlling your blood sugar level
- Not smoking or chewing tobacco
- Not going barefooted and always wearing protective footwear



Be sure to dry between your toes before you put your shoes on.

8. Dental Disease

People with diabetes are more likely to have problems with their teeth and gums if blood sugar is not controlled.



Protect your teeth by brushing at least twice a day and flossing each day.



Healthy teeth and gums depend on regular care and controlling your blood sugar.



See your dentist at least every 6 months.

9. Vaccinations

The flu and pneumonia are serious illnesses that can put you in the hospital. Getting a yearly flu shot may prevent this. Ask your health care team or doctor about getting a shot to prevent pneumococcal disease too, especially if you have not had one in the last 5 years.



Division of Diabetes Translation
National Center for Chronic Disease
Prevention and Health Promotion
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Purpose and Acknowledgments

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Cover photo: Courtesy of State of Hawaii Department of Health—Nutrition and Physical Activity Section

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